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# Bo Gritz: The Glory & The Search

## Our Job Is Simple—To Liberate U.S. POWs from Asia ASAP

By Art Harris

*"Under the law, we will be armed terrorists," Bo Gritz was telling his men. "But because none of us are in uniform, it lets the U.S. government off the hook."*

*"If we get caught they can say, 'We couldn't control those crazy bastards. If we self-immolate, they can say, 'They were just a bunch of crazies who never got over the war.'"*

*"But if we bring back just one live American POW, he becomes the ante for the biggest poker game this nation will ever play in this decade."*

**H**E IS A HIGHLY decorated Vietnam war hero, a muscled six-footer with curly blond hair, hard blue eyes, a black belt in karate and very little self doubt. An ex-Green Beret officer who scorns "faint hearts" in the Pentagon and "potbellied" bureaucrats, James Gordon (Bo) Gritz (rhymes with "sights") is the new point man for Right Wing Romance.

Surely, God and Buddha are on his side, even as he sits in jail half a world away, a soldier of fortune under arrest in Thailand for launching his own commando raid into Laos to rescue American prisoners he believes are still being held a decade after a war as controversial as his exploits.

It is a modern day holy grail that Gritz, 44, has chased for four years, issuing press releases from the jungle on his "covert" mission, fueling heroic fantasies and, most recently, hustling cash from movie stars like Clint Eastwood and high tech communications gear from companies like Litton, all the while pitching for handouts from families of a few of about 2,500 soldiers still unaccounted for a decade after the last prisoners came home from Vietnam.

Actor William Shatner said on Johnny Carson's show that he purchased Gritz's life story—"a modern-day Sgt. York"—for \$10,000. And in a curious Hollywood twist, Eastwood anted up \$30,000, and phoned President Reagan last year to say that Gritz

was planning a raid into Laos to hunt POWs. He lobbied his fellow actor for government help.

And why not? Bo Gritz is Made for TV. If ever there were a war of nobility, full of macho-Zen overtones for men like Gritz, this is it, a middle-aged man going back to 'Nam to slash through the jungle and bring 'em back alive. Gritz calls his POW-hunters "the over the hill gang."

"There's no question about his skills as a soldier," says William P. Yarborough, 71, a retired army general who commanded the Green Berets at Fort Bragg during Vietnam. "But his former incarnation as a Green Beret has gotten him a little out of phase with reality. I just hope they don't hold it against the breed because one guy caught his foot in a trap."

First you have to find the POWs, if any are alive years later, perhaps skin and bones and near psychotic wondering why America forgot. A straitjacket was on Gritz's supply list—in case any POW freaked out behind the lines.

Gritz argues that POWs are being held as "bargaining chips" for war reparations that never came—the North Vietnamese government says it is owed \$3 billion promised by President Nixon.

"It's easy to see their logic," he says. "Anyone captured in Cambodia or Laos were not technically POWs, so they are not obligated to be returned or recognized. Our job is simple—to liberate U.S. POWs from Asia ASAP. Why? Because we want them back, so we can begin negotiations for the others."

What others? Although some 480 live sitings have been claimed by refugees since 1975, Pentagon officials cannot confirm them. And what would Vietnam, or an impoverished nation like Laos, have to gain by keeping them for so long? America still has B-52s and a president who pledges to get them out if any can be found.

Gritz once had access to top secret Pentagon data, leaked to him via the National League of POW-MIA Families with sympathetic intelligence access. But that was before the League **STAT** withdrew its support from Gritz.